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SUBJECT Liberation Theology

WILLIAM BUCKLEY: The idea of liberation theology is only about 20 years old, but it is the hottest issue within the community of the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul has spoken out against it, but recently the Vatican suggested that a new papal statement is on the way, which statement, it is predicted, will be conciliatory toward the theological liberationists, some of whom go so far as to attempt to integrate Karl Marx in their thinking in the role of prophet and exegete.

To discuss the matter, we have as our guests today two prominent American theologians and churchmen.

The Reverend George William Rutler is associate pastor of the Church of Our Lady of Victory in New York, serving the Wall Street financial district. Father Rutler holds six degrees in various fields. He is a graduate of Dartmouth and Johns Hopkins. He has studied in Paris and Oxford, and holds the Pontifical Doctorate in Sacred Theology from Rome. He is a contributing editor to the New Oxford Review and author of several books.

The Reverend William D. Smith, a professor of moral theology, is Dean of St. Joseph's Seminary at Dunwiddie in Yonkers, New York, the principal seminary for the Archdiocese of New York. Father Smith was ordained a priest in 1966. He is widely published in scholarly journals and in weekly journals. He is a member of the editorial board of Linnica (?) Quarterly, and served a term as President of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars.

I should like to begin by asking Father Smith to tell us how, at his moment in the controversy, the Vatican stands on the

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subject, while leaving it until later to explore the issues themselves.

What's about to happen, or supposed to be about to happen?

FATHER WILLIAM D. SMITH: Immediately, it's not entirely clear. But back in the autumn, at Labor Day, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith put out a formal statement, of which Cardinal Ratzinger is the prefect. And buried in the statement were indications that there'd be further clarifications in the future. But the Ratzinger document, which is a formal teaching statement, outlined clear incompatibilities with the Catholic faith in the somewhat umbrella term that goes by liberation theology. It did not name names or individual authors, but it mentioned enough elements to put two and two together.

It's been coming for a while, and yet there's probably more to come.

BUCKLEY: It was after that, was it not, that the Vatican called in Father Boffe from Brazil? And as I understand it, the idea was to question him about what he was saying, with the view to decide whether or not it was theologically tolerable. Is that correct?

Now, is it known what has happened since that examination, or what verdict was reached?

FATHER SMITH: No. That's still on hold. That came before.

BUCKLEY: It came before?

FATHER SMITH: Actually, Cardinal Ratzinger gave a talk to the Roman authorities last -- toward the end of 1983. And I knew it was important because it was criticized by all the dissenters before it was published. And it was defended, especially by Mr. Briggs in The Times, say last June. Many people came to the defense of Gutierrez before we even had a charge about, or against Gutierrez.

BUCKLEY: The Peruvian.

FATHER SMITH: Then, during most of the summer, the business with Leonardo Boffe -- Friar Boffe, as he's called. I think it evokes Robin Hood and his merry band, or something. And he went to Rome. There was a formal exchange.

BUCKLEY: He was escorted by a couple of cardinals, too, wasn't he?

FATHER SMITH: Yeah. He had more cardinals on his side than Ratzinger did.

[Laughter]

FATHER SMITH: And they didn't reach complete agreement, and the Congregation said that they would get back, and they would.

But he, Gutierrez, Boffe, Juan Sabrino, these are probably the leading lights of the Latin American version of liberation theology.

BUCKLEY: Well, so we have a situation in which the Catholic community, and that wider audience that is obviously interested in the formulation of Catholic policy, whether it's on abortion or on liberation theology, is sort of waiting to see what this clarification from the Vatican is going to say to us.

I'd like now to ask you, Father Rutler, how is it that the movement continues to grow, notwithstanding the cold water that's been thrown on it by the Pope, explicitly in this Labor Day statement, and beginning with his warnings in the Puebla Conference of Bishops in 1979?

FATHER GEORGE WILLIAM RUTLER: Well, there was a conference in '79. There was one in '68.

BUCKLEY: In Medellin.

FATHER RUTLER: In Medellin. And [unintelligible] tackled the same question.

Well, to call it a movement, first of all, is to attribute to it a certain dignity of growth, which may exist, but it's very hard to measure.

First of all, it is a theory. Ideas do have effects, and they are having effects in Latin American in particular. But the theory is based on an attempt to create a movement. So it succeeds, in large measure -- this is from a Marxist point of view -- to the degree to which it actually does become a movement. The evidences are that in many places it is taken seriously.

Part of the very structure of liberation theology is that it establishes base communities of indoctrination, catechetical centers. And this is a complaint of the Sacred Congregation, that the people who come to these base communities in good faith do not have the critical faculties to understand what is erroneous in what they're being taught.

So, if it is growing, it's growing largely out of an artificial encouragement of those communities themselves. And it's free to grow as long as it's not explicitly condemned.

BUCKLEY: Well, let me play the contrary advocate here for a moment -- it would load the discussion too distinctly if I were to say the devil's advocate -- and ask you this:

In your judgment, is Marx seaparable from his position in respect of atheism?

FATHER RUTLER: Do you mean could Marxism be applied by a Christian for Christian ends?

BUCKLEY: Yeah.

FATHER RUTLER: No. This is a fundamental case of the Church against the Marxist form of liberation theology. Here we have to qualify what we're talking about. Liberation theology has various forms. And what is specifically condemned is the Marxist critique used by many liberation theologians.

Marx, himself, draws initially on the theologian Feuerbach, who says that any critique of the human problem, which fundamentally is alienation, has to be a critique of religion. And Marx then does make a critique of religion by dismissing it, on this ground: that basic human excellencies are, over the course of human experience, projected onto an external spirit called God, which is really a figure of speech for Marx, but which then deprives the individual of control over his own virtue. So, in the interest of virtue, Marx sees it necessary to eliminate the idea of God.

And this, first of all, has its consequences for religion. Even the Church cannot get on without God for very long.

BUCKLEY: Well, how would you handle the argument of someone who said: If you excrete that conclusion of Marx, might you not then be left with a prophet of class antagonisms whose essential analytical and social findings are useful in pursuing a better world, defined here as a world in which the workaday tensions dissipate? Workaday tensions being primarily the result of the existence of property.

FATHER RUTLER: Well, the humane inspirations of people attracted to Marxism are based on a concern for the poor and justice. So, in that sense, the Christian has to pay attention to it.

Where Marxism fails is in the fact that it's wrong.

It's wrong, first of all, because its critical method is based on an erroneous idea of history. History, to the Marxist, is a matter of class struggle. The genesis of man comes about by his evolution through labor. It's completely horizontal progress separated from any transcendent reference, any vision of the heavenly kingdom.

Secondly, it's a loaded thing from the start, because you have an analysis of history which is inseparable from the praxis. Your vision of history has to determine your analysis of it. So right from the very start, the consciousness is a partisan one. That being the case, for the Marxist, you determine right from wrong by entering into the class struggle, which involves violence.

Therefore, what Marx calls morality is, fundamentally for the Christian, the absence of morality. The very fundamental ground of the distinction between good and evil -- namely, God -- is eliminated.

BUCKLEY: Well, let's ask Father Smith how he handles the attention given by these theologians to one or two passages within the Bible. The Magnificat of Luke is quoted: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent, empty, away."

Now, this is accepted, really, as an earthly injunction, is it not, by people like Father Gutierrez?

FATHER SMITH: Yeah.

BUCKLEY: And the answer is, what kind of -- with what kind of assurance can you, in coping with that argument, insist that Christ was -- or that Luke, rather, was speaking in metaphors?

FATHER SMITH: This is one of the problems that Cardinal Ratzinger brings to the fore early. He gives two examples, one of which is your Magnificat, the other of which is the Exodus event, very often.

You can go about 200 pages in Gutierrez's book before you have any theological reference. So you have the Exodus event, delivery from slavery in Egypt, basically seen as a political event.

BUCKLEY: Secular leadership.

FATHER SMITH: Exactly.

Never are we told that the purpose of that liberation

was to get to Sinai to establish a covenant that would result in the worship of God.

Early on, the Cardinal points out the primary liberation in the Christian perspective is the liberation in Christ from personal sin. If we get that wrong, we get everything wrong. If sin is first of all social, and man is the agent of deliverance, and the focus is this world, you end up with a secularized Gospel. Then there'll come to the Magnificat as some kind of magnificent statement in power politics. And then the entire Bible is read through the prism of this analysis, which goes back to the prior warning.

And actually, before, we were mentioning books and authors. But the test case has already been -- it exists in flesh and blood, I believe. Nicaragua is not strong on theologians, but the test case has already been met, and they've failed the test.

The key concern, I think, from Ratzinger is not economic analysis right here, it's doctrinal analysis. And the holy horror of the Catholic Church is schism. And this is exactly what has been accomplished there. And the Church, herself -- they're not for all the poor, they're just for the poor who have an ideologically correct understanding of the revolution. And then that split comes right into worship. If you're part of the manager class or the teaching class or the bishops, you won't be given communion in certain base communities. Everything is judged -- and this is why the warning goes back: Can you just dip into Marxist analysis, eliminate alleged impurities, and run off with this critique? And Ratzinger is saying you can't do that, because the critique itself has presuppositions, non-transcendent presuppositions. You separate violence from ethics. The only truth is class truth. Whoever, out of good will or frustration, buys into that, Christianity's got to lose.

BUCKLEY: So, what he was saying is not only is it dogmatically incompatible; but for that reason, empirically, it will always conduce to undesirable results.

FATHER RUTLER: Yes, because it's a lie against history.

Now, you quoted the Magnificat. Who sang that but the Mother of Christ? This is an old Jewish song that she raises to a new dignity, the song of Tebbera (?), their great exultation of the women in the Exodus. But what she does is then draw the attention of her people to the fact that the Exodus is itself a sign of the wandering of the human race toward heaven, and the discovery of it through a passover, which is going to involve a sacrifice.

That's the thing that the Marxists, first of all, cannot

abide, the idea of sacrifice, unless it's elicited from somebody else, you see. If you remove a burden, the totalitarian will impose it on someone else. He will not take up his cross. This is what Mary's Son is about to say.

And she uses a Hebrew parallelism there. She says the mighty are going to be thrown out, and the humble and the weak will be raised up. And then the rich will be cast out, and the poor will be raised up.

The parallel there, then, you see, is between poverty and humility. And her Son will then make it in the Sermon on the Mount when he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and He is speaking of that humility, that detachment from things of this world. It is not an economic category, although it has its economic manifestations.

So, the Blessed Mother is not a Chairman, or a Madam Mao. This is not a war song that the voices on earth will understand. It's a war song rallying the angels.

The Marxist is really lying against history when he takes that and makes it pedantic. The Marxist is very embarrassed by the fact that the poverty of the Holy Family was a spiritual detachment. It was that humility of which Mary is a symbol.

As a matter of fact, in social analysis, the Marxists would have to admit, if pressed to the point, which is why he avoids it, that the Holy Family -- and I say this with no disrespect, but with great awe and reverence -- was what the Marxists would call petit bourgeois. Joseph was a shopkeeper, he had a trade. They -- Mary, herself, as far as we know from Cana, was a bit of a managerial type, herself. She was arranging a banquet there. Maybe she had a business on the side. I don't know. That's very possible.

And this is the offense, you see, to the person who wants to dramatize history beyond the supernatural drama. They want to exaggerate or classify that poverty. They cannot abide the fact that the poverty of Christ and the Holy Family was a poverty of detachment, a poverty of humility, and a poverty of anonymity.

BUCKLEY: Well, they would call this, I think, the problem of idealism. As you know, they reject the notion that Christians should acknowledge two seers, one heavenly and another contemporary. They insist on -- they really insist that the Biblical mandate is to take power for the purpose of attempting to perfect the world we live in. And they consider it both fatalistic and incorrect to read the Bible otherwise.

Now, under the circumstances, they've developed not only an appetite for a form of angelism, but also a capacity to see it where, I think, normal eyes don't.

For instance, here's one Maryknoll describing Castro's Cuba: "There is an impressive spirit of revolutionary idealism in the Cuban people and in their lifestyle. There is no doubt that the Cuban revolution has contributed to better education, to medical attention for the island's ten million population. It emphasizes the dignity of women, workers, and campesinos. Another development is a dedicated internationalism permeating Cuban society, the realization of personal responsibility for people outside the nation's borders. These advances in the brief span of 20 years are unparalleled in Latin America."

Now, that, it seems to me, is, in the first place, to bear false witness -- i.e., all of those things have not in fact happened. Secondly, had they happened, they would probably be something that happened notwithstanding the attempt to corrupt the philosophical base of the Cuban people.

However, it seems to me that you are both rather overconfident that this minor heresy will sort of go away, given that it laps up even on the shores of the Maryknoll, 40 miles from here, and is indirectly reflected in some of the writings of Kenneth Briggs in the New York Times.

FATHER SMITH: No, I'm not overconfident. I really believe the motive behind the Doctrine of the Faith Congregation was because of their concern for the unity of the Church. Presently, a third of the Catholic Church is in Latin America. By the year 2000, it'll be a half. And that's a main segment of the Catholic Church.

BUCKLEY: Well, that's pessimistic about the growth of the Catholic faith elsewhere, isn't it?

FATHER SMITH: Well, I think Europe is doing a good job of dying. If you go by their population rates, if you have a 1.2 instead of replacement level, it's numbered by the statistics.

And there'd be many people who are cheering for it here in the United States. [Unintelligible] Maryknoll publishes everything. But almost humorously, a couple of weeks after it came out, I think there was someone from Loyola in Chicago, Thomas Sheahan, Sheahan had an op-ed in the New York Times pointing out that the unfortunate part about this whole thing was that John Paul II didn't understand the nuances of Marxism.

I find this unbelievable. The Pope, personally, grew up with it, lived with it, has been in a dual of wits with it all his adult life. And then someone in a library in Chicago, whose

main contacts with Marxism...

BUCKLEY: Accuses the Pope of naivete.

FATHER SMITH: Yeah. He doesn't understand the subtleties in Marxism with a human face.

Solzhenitsyn was on the other side. He's given us other information.

And very uncritically -- it falls in with some other liberation things. But that business of the secular gospel, the secular world, secular salvation. Sin is social; therefore, all we need, really, is a little social engineering to fix that. And one of the more significant sentences in there is that social evils are not so much the cause as the consequence of personal sin. And they don't accept that at all. And then you end up with what Carl Barth called another gospel. This is just not the New Testament.

BUCKLEY: Let me ask you this, because you've made three references to it. Do I understand you to be saying that there is no such thing as social sin, only individual sin?

FATHER RUTLER: There are social consequences to sin. But sin, strictly defined, has to be a human act. Very often they speak of sinful structures. It must be an accommodation, like a sinful episode or a sinful play, if you want to talk that. But strictly speaking, you can only predicate good and evil of human actions.

BUCKLEY: Well, how would you -- how would that doctrine, for instance, handle a society which has a conscription law, to which the Church a doctrinal exception, which conscription law is used to draft young men and cause those young men to fight unjust wars? It's not the individual's sin in this case, is it? It is a social sin that they should be committed to that particular use, is it not? So it would be the government one would condemn, rather than the individual, would it not?

FATHER SMITH: You could. But I think we're accommodating the use. We're using the word a little bit more broadly. You could speak of a wrong situation, even a sinful situation, or even, I suppose, a sinful government. But the problem is, I can't absolve a sinful structure. I'm not sure I can absolve a sinful government, either.

But there are choices, human choices, wrong, bad human choices, which we call sinful, which have consequences.

BUCKLEY: I see. In this case, it would be the leaders

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who sent these young men out on unjust wars.

FATHER SMITH: Or the voters.

BUCKLEY: Or the voters. Ah-ha.

Now, the Church has often said that it is -- it has no position concerning different modes of government. You can't say the Catholic Church is pro-capitalist or that the Catholic Church is pro-socialist or that the Catholic Church is pro-monarchy or anti-monarchy, etcetera, etcetera. At what point does the Church, as you understand it, permit itself to say a study of the practice of certain modes of government entitles us, on the basis of historical experience, to oppose such governments?

FATHER RUTLER: Well, you have to analyze the evidences of good and evil. And there are three ways to regulate anything. One is through amputation, if it's evil. The other one is through mortification discipline, if there's a mix of good and evil there, an ambiguity. And the third is limitation, if it's good, but we cannot have an unrestricted good.

This is why when the Pope talks about capitalism he does not condemn it, but he speaks fervently about the need of a capitalist to be socially responsible. The Marxist looks upon it as not something which can be limited, because it is not a good, it is an inherent evil. So he goes back to amputation. That's why you have violence.

Now, in Cardinal Ratzinger's document, there's a whole section in -- the seventh section, I think the thirteenth paragraph, he has a sweeping condemnation of what he calls neocolonialism, exploitation, selfishness. It's a very strong statement. But he is not condemning an economic system. He's condemning the abuse.

So what it gets really down to is the definition of good and evil. And this is what the Marxist will not do. He does not believe that there is such a thing as a cosmic good and that there was a voice that said Serviam (?), I will serve in Christ, and remedying the voice of Satan, who said Non Serviam, I will not serve.

And I'll give you an example of how the Church sees this. In the 1976 Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia, there was a gathering and various people were speaking. And this one man got up and gave a little speech in which he embarrassed everybody. He said that it is written in the third chapter of Genesis that the choice was given to man, the temptation, "You shall be gods." And man has always been tempted to take up that offer, and has resisted sometimes, and has succumbed in other

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times. But perhaps now the hour is ripe for the final temptation. And it is possible that we are about to see the final confrontation between the word and the anti-word.

And everybody coughed a little, and the man then left. And two years later he appeared on the balcony of St. Peter's in Rome dressed in white.

BUCKLEY: Don't tell me.

FATHER RUTLER: Yes.

BUCKLEY: Is that right?

FATHER RUTLER: Yes.

BUCKLEY: Gee, that's a pretty dramatic story. Did he use the word Armageddon?

FATHER RUTLER: He had said this a few months before, the Lent before to the Roman Curia, in retreat. Paul VI was on the throne.

It's a very dramatic scene. These times are so dramatic that if you were to have anticipated them in a novel or a film 15 years ago, people would have said it was outlandish. But these things happen. And Paul VI was on the throne, the Curia was gathered around.

BUCKLEY: You'd sound like Malachy Martin.

FATHER RUTLER: And this Polish Cardinal said this same thing there in the Curia.

The Pope understands good and evil, in other words, as a cosmic thing.

BUCKLEY: Let me not permit a little hit-and-run here on neocolonialism. Do I understand you to say the Cardinal denounced neocolonialism, having first described it, or having not bothered to describe it?

FATHER RUTLER: He did not define it. And he gave the impression he did not approve of it, but he did not say what it was he was not approving of.

BUCKLEY: Because, for instance, I'd be very much, personally, in favor of a little neocolonialism in Libya right now.

FATHER RUTLER: Neo or colonialism?

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BUCKLEY: Well, it would be neo because it had been colonized, of course, for several hundred years.

But the notion that a colonial gesture is per se sinful strikes me as elevating independence beyond rational bounds. That is to say, one would rather a society governed by, say, Colonel Idi Amin lost its independence than that it should continue to be a sacrificial order for 120,000 per year at the hands of a madman, wouldn't we?

FATHER RUTLER: Well, it would certainly improve famine conditions in Ethiopia.

BUCKLEY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

So, in other words, neocolonialism is denounced -- I want to be quite certain about this -- surely, depending on the motives of those people who make those exertions.

Okay, fine.

So, therefore, we haven't yet identified a social arrangement which is [unintelligible] sinful. It's only the people who use that arrangement for evil purposes who are sinful.

FATHER SMITH: With one caution. Pius XI went on record...

BUCKLEY: On communism.

FATHER SMITH: ...saying that communism and Catholicism are incompatible.

BUCKLEY: That's right.

FATHER RUTLER: And he was also the one who said it was the duty of the Church to evangelize, not civilize.

BUCKLEY: Which is true.

FATHER RUTLER: Exactly. Otherwise, we get preachy instead of preaching. We become moralizers instead of moral. This is the thing that is so pedantic and so boring about Marxism, besides the fact it doesn't work; and that is that it is so preachy, so moralizing, so sickening that way.

BUCKLEY: How can you moralize when you don't distinguish between good and evil?

FATHER RUTLER: You invent your morality. It gives you a great...

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FATHER SMITH: Well, if it serves the revolution, it's good. And if it doesn't serve the revolutionary process...

BUCKLEY: Well, that's an instrumental form of morality. But morality surely deals with the distinction between good and evil. And that which is, quotes-unquotes, good is a metaphor, under strict Marxist usage. It either furthers the revolution or doesn't further the revolution.

FATHER SMITH: ...cut off the transcendent base. Like the Church documents will always speak about the nature, the origin and the destiny of man, where we come from, where we're going, and God. Once you cut that off, then you end up with some kind of a secular calculation of good and evil, and you're using terms in a different way. And that's why, constantly, it's a separation of violence from ethics. Violence or unjust force can be used to advance the revolution. Anything that doesn't advance the revolution -- now, the Catholic Church is not officially pacifist. It does have a theory to accommodate the just use of force, even the just use of war, even the just use of a war of revolution. And if there were situations, as there were in our own Revolution, and some others, we'd have no big problem with that.

BUCKLEY: Is there doctrinal difficulty, for instance, with the slogan, if that's what you want to call it, "Sic semper tyrannus"?

FATHER RUTLER: Doctrinal difficulty?

BUCKLEY: Yeah. I.e., is the conclusion that force ought not to be used against an oppressor so comprehensive as to discourage the notion that tyrants should, if necessary, die at sword-point?

FATHER RUTLER: Well, Our Lord said "Sic semper tyrannus."

BUCKLEY: That's what I say.

FATHER RUTLER: But in absolute silence. When the judge looks at him, or your king, you say it, and he affirms it. But then he manifests his kingship, you see. That's the essential difference.

When Cardinal Ratzinger cites the virtue of many people who sincerely believe even in some form of Marxist interpretation of liberation theology, he says that the very desire for liberation is a round-about way of saying that we are in the image of God. The insufficiency of liberation theology, where it is Marxist, is that it doesn't know what to do about it. It doesn't understand that to be in the image of God means that we have a

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soul. That's the only reason we can conceive of freedom, to begin with. So they can only get halfway to freedom. Half-freedom is independence. Now, that's freedom from something. Total freedom, holy freedom, is freedom for a thing. And that can only be accomplished through being free from the ultimate tyrant, and that's death.

Our Lord said "Sic semper tyrannus" on the cross.

BUCKLEY: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But the notion that there's an inherent right of someone who is -- by someone who is oppressed to physically take measures against the oppressor is or is not dignified by Christian tradition?

FATHER RUTLER: It is dignified because Christian tradition invents the concept of dignitas. The very idea of Marxism is that man does not have an inherent dignity. He is defined by his class struggle, and the individual is dispensable. This is the fundamental complaint of the Church against the Marxist critique of history, that it robs man of his dignity.

BUCKLEY: If a Christian Cambodian were to have assassinated Pol Pot, would he have needed to confess that?

FATHER RUTLER: Yes, and then taken the advice of his confessor on the subject, who may have concluded that it was not the sin he thought, you know, because the Church makes a distinction between killing and murder, and qualifies this, as [unintelligible] was saying, on the question of justice and by the definition of justice.

BUCKLEY: But doesn't killing require some kind of civic sanction? That is to say, a killing by a soldier is different from killing by an individual, notwithstanding that the same guy gets killed.

FATHER RUTLER: Well, consider the moral economy of Our Lord. You would have no authority were it not given you from above.

FATHER SMITH: But we would need a few more conditions in there than someone just figuring out who their favorite tyrant is...

[Confusion of voices]

FATHER SMITH: The conditions for a just war are extended further to a just revolution. I mean it can't be one grievance from somebody. There has to be a gross and continuing denial of basic human rights. You must be convinced that, in terms of proportion, more good will come about, or will you create a worse situation?

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BUCKLEY: Let's assume the situation were as clear as indeed it was in Cambodia ten years ago; or, if you like, Hitler. Would Christian doctrine understand or authorize an individual, on his own, [Latin expression], pull out a rifle and aiming it at Adolf Hitler? Or would he have to have been an agent of the British Government that had declared war on Hitler, or a member of some kind of formal insurrectionary group?

FATHER SMITH: Authorizing the agent might -- it's hard to figure than one through. But if someone told me that they were the one who actually killed Hitler, and they did kill Hitler, and this is after a long period, that they knew what they were doing, people were suffering...

BUCKLEY: You'd give them him Hail Marys on that.

FATHER SMITH: I'm not sure. I'd say, "Maybe together we'd say a prayer for his deceased relatives. But you did well, Friend."

BUCKLEY: I see. I see.

FATHER SMITH: "You have done the human race a favor."

FATHER RUTLER: I knew a lady who said that she had been to a rally in Nuremberg, and this was in the early days of Hitler. She said, "If I knew then what I know now, I would have shot him." I shocked me to hear this nice old lady saying that. But the problem was, of course, she didn't know. She didn't know then.

FATHER SMITH: Actually, Aquinas calls it a virtue.

BUCKLEY: Did he?

FATHER SMITH: That if the innocent is being oppressed and you foresee the probable outcome, you can do something about it, and you fail to, he says that is vicious. Because you are upholding the order of justice, and therefore making an act of virtue in defending the innocent.

BUCKLEY: How would Gutierrez have handled that? Might he have interpreted that, say, as a license to kill off the colonels who ran Peru up until four or five years ago?

FATHER SMITH: That's where we need the conditions, because someone will play fast and loose with that.

FATHER RUTLER: He would have had to extend his knowledge of St. Thomas, to the distinction that he makes between reason and intelligence. And you can reason a thing to death, and that's called rationalizing it, the deductive arrival at a

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truth. But intelligence, itself, is an intuitive perception: I see the truth.

These people, a lot of the Marxist interpreters, are rationalizing their interpretation of the truth because they don't believe in a transcendent truth itself. They have a paradise in mind. But when that workers' paradise is built, they have to put a wall around it without gates to keep the people in. This is the antithesis of the Kingdom of God, which has 12 gates in the wall to allow the people in.

BUCKLEY: Well, let's get concrete here and attempt to address ourselves to some of the questions being asked by people who are concerned about what's happening right now in Latin America, and the extent to which organized Christianity, which is mostly Catholic, is playing a role there. What you seem to see, reading the journals that cover these matters, is a kind of slippage in the direction of liberation theology. The attempt to analyze that is less easily done by telling us that here is an extraordinary theological insight into the ultimate compatibility of Marx and Christ, but rather a politics of despair that looks to the Church to do something about a persistently awful situation.

Now, Cardinal Arns was on my program from Sao Paulo three or four years ago, and this is really the line he was taking, that it is the job of the clergy to give their communicants reasons not to despair.

Of course I made the obvious comment that presumably, if the Kingdom of God is not of this world, there can be no cause, ultimately, to despair.

Well, "Yes. Yes, my son," was his general attitude, "but there are other and more immediate problems, like food, shelter, medical aid. And unless you can give them grounds to believe that that is achievable, they will despair."

The popular notion in much of thinking America is that liberation theology is heading in that direction because not enough progress is otherwise being made in Latin America.

Comment.

FATHER SMITH: Often the case. But there are different fact situations in Latin America. Argentina and Colombia are very, very different from Brazil. And I think Lopez-Trujillo, that Cardinal in Colombia, is probably the ideological opponent of everything that's going on in Nicaragua. This, I think, explains how many well-meaning American missionaries go to a situation, they work hard, they bank their head against a wall;

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but brought up as we were, with instant coffee, instant music, instant results -- there are not instant results. And in frustration, as angry people often do, you reach around for any -- any weapon will do, even if it's a boomerang.

I think, in most cases, the Marxists are smarter than that.

But it also helps us to focus, I think, on what would be a proper political philosophy. I believe it is. And I think the Holy Father -- I'm not guessing. He said it in Puebla, and he said it more than once. The proper role of the hierarchy and the clergy is to preach the truth, teach the truth about God and man, to teach valid general social principles. But on the concrete application to partisan solutions, that is neither the charism nor the competence of clergy

BUCKLEY: To what extent do those truths require submissiveness?

FATHER SMITH: Partisan proposals?

BUCKLEY: No, no, no, no, no. To what extent does the preaching of the truth call on the Church to ask its parishioners to be submissive? Is that a virtue in a situation that borders on despair?

FATHER SMITH: Well, we'd have an obligation, an obligation, in justice, toward the common good, to support just laws and a just society. Everything is a little bit less than perfectly just. And until that got way out of balance, the Fourth Commandment -- it's not popular, but Aquinas explains patriotism as a virtue.

FATHER RUTLER: This is a question of submission to obedience, because it is only through obedience that freedom is born. The totalitarian mentality requires an obedience to submission, a loss of the private conscience. And this is the lack of dignity, the fundamental affront which the Church is warning that the most -- the best-intended people will lead the hungry into a deeper hunger, and the most oppressed into a worse kind of violence.

And we see this modeled again -- and it's not a withdrawal from reality when we look at the Gospel. This is reality in its fundamental prism.

There was a sincere Marxist amongst the apostles. There is an apostolic precedent for Marxism. It was Judas. Now, why? Judas, there, is in the room when they're pouring the precious ointment on Christ, and he says, "You shouldn't waste the gross

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national product. You should give it to the poor." And it's because of that limited view of sacrifice and to history that he ends up killing himself. He can only repent, says Scripture, unto himself.

Now, Peter denies Our Lord three times, and yet he becomes Pope, because he repents back to the Lord. He refuses to succumb unto that ultimate poverty, which is cynicism.

Our Lord says the same thing to Mary and Martha. Now, they have a kind of -- when Martha is trying to set up a base community there in their house. She's running about doing all kinds of reforming things. She doesn't understand that Christ is not a reformer, he's a redeemer.

He says, "Martha, Martha, you are busy with a great many things. But only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better portion," the source of eternal life, the source of her dignity, that will qualify any legitimate reform. And that's not an abstraction.

The problem with so many of the critics is they don't understand that liberation theology has been tried.

BUCKLEY: The headline I thought was interesting -- this was in the New York Times in June, which is three months before the Cardinal Ratzinger communication: "Catholic Liberals Defend Activism. Major Challenge to Vatical on Role of Church in Politics." Then, of course, the long story, in which they talk about Gutierrez and Chilabecs (?) and everybody.

Now, could it be that the operative word, really, here is activism. There's a sense in which the traditional Church is being criticized for being less than energetic enough.

Let me wind this in another way. About ten years ago, Irving Kristol said, "Who really thinks that poverty in South America would endure if, for instance, tomorrow you were to drop 50 million Swiss in Brazil?" And this forces you to to acknowledge that the ethos has a great deal to do with matters of progress and poverty; and the cultivation of an ethos that induces to hard work, savings, husbandry, inventiveness is something that tends to make people impatient if you think of in terms of breeding it by education, but rather more excited by the notion of imposing it through some sort of a socialist cadre.

So, is it that lack of activism that's associated with the traditional Church that is causing so much sympathy with the liberationists?

FATHER RUTLER: The Church has been the singular most

active influence in society, Western society, for the last 2000 years. It's all rubbish when people say that.

BUCKLEY: They were certainly effective colonizers.

FATHER RUTLER: Yes. Well, they also did the gracious benevolence towards an oppressed people by not sending them in a bunch of Swiss.

FATHER SMITH: That may not be the solution, a bunch of Swiss.

FATHER RUTLER: Just sending a lot of Swiss people to teach Latin Americans how to be boring.

[Laughter]

FATHER RUTLER: You see, what you have -- Cardinal Ratzinger says...

BUCKLEY: And make cuckoo clocks.

FATHER RUTLER: Make cuckoo clocks. Because you have -- you have to have a concept of man based on the concept of God in the world, which is the Church, which is then based on the understanding of Christ. If you don't have an understanding of Christ, the Church, then man becomes boring to other people and boring to himself. And people would know that if they read history.

All this was tried in the 19th Century. A great genius, a greater genius than anybody working on liberation theology today, Laminet (?). He had been swindled by Rousseau, but he finally became a Catholic. He began to write about the social consciousness of the Church and how the prophetic voice of the Church should not be intimidated by political power. He wrote three very powerful volumes, 1818, 1820, 1823. And he almost got a cardinal's hat from Leo XII.

But there were Sopicians (?) and Jesuits who then, like now, were brilliant, but then used their minds. And he -- they said there is something suspicious in what he is saying. He is saying, basically, that the genius of the Church as a social reformer is because of its long experience. But he is not saying that it is an authority given to it from above.

So, eventually, he was condemned in two encyclicals by the next Pope, Gregory XVI. And then he wrote his great book [French expression], in which he bares his soul and he really says he cannot understand man because he cannot understand the Church, and he cannot understand the Church because he cannot

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understand Christ. So he loses his faith, he joins parliament. The great revolution comes, 1848, but then in 1852 the reaction destroys him.

So what you see there is, in the treatment given to him, first by Leo XII and then by Gregory XVI, you have a parallel with Paul VI and John Paul II, a very consistent warning on liberation theology.

Then the final thing is that Pius IX, the great liberal Pope who's been caricatured by misinformed historians...

BUCKLEY: There are two Pius the IXs.

FATHER SMITH: He started off very liberal.

BUCKLEY: That's right.

FATHER RUTLER: Well, he was a consistent man. His observers were inconsistent, you see.

BUCKLEY: He just discovered a series of errors along the way.

FATHER RUTLER: He discovered error. And it's very touching to see how Pius XI tries to bring Laminet back into the Church. I really think that's what John Paul II is doing here. He realizes there's an abundance of natural virtue amongst many of these theologians, and that they are robbing themselves because they do not understand the theological virtues. For them, faith is simply a confidence in history.

BUCKLEY: I think all of what you said is absolutely correct, engrossing and illuminating. It fails, however, to synchronize with the nervous mood of the 20th Century, which, as you said in another context a moment ago, gives you things like instant coffee and instant satisfaction, and movies and television, on the basis of which people can see how other people are living. And for those people, it becomes very difficult to say that creature satisfactions, such as a lack of hunger or shelter, are something that they can count on in the next world, but can't count on in this world. Which is probably what makes nostrums so merchandisable in the 20th Century, which would not have been in the 19th Century.

FATHER RUTLER: Well, you know, Christ fed 5000 people, and then he said, "I'm doing this because I have bread that you do not know of."

FATHER SMITH: Part of the standing criticism, at least in the conventional wisdom, is that the Church was too cozy,

particularly in Latin America, with the haves. And some went from what they describe as one either-or to the next either-or, and they made a big flip.

I still think the basic thrust of Catholic social teaching is you can't have a good society without good people. And the primary focus of the Church is the formation of conscience, preservation of worthy traditions, insistence on the Judeo-Christian ethic, and all of that type of thing.

But the more they get into a quick political solution, the less they do what they should do. And it will be absolutely counterproductive.

But in the long period of history there were some situations that were just too cozy. There were always good people, there were always bad people. But the solution...

[Confusion of voices]

FATHER SMITH: We can't rewrite everything in rosy pictures.

FATHER RUTLER: But the fact is that that corruption was...

FATHER SMITH: Okay. Was the wrong choices of individual people who were responsible for them. And their change will come, their personal salvation will come through Jesus Christ as well, not through just tinkering with the social system.

FATHER RUTLER: But you see, those problems are the result of a failure to be Christian. The problems Marxism causes are directly the result of an obedience to orthodox Marxism. That's the essential difference.

FATHER SMITH: Okay. And I wouldn't question that. But when we register the annoyance -- and that may be, "Well, this takes too long, and it sounds like you're for me-tooism." -- I think the principle is sound. And what are we finding, the principle or those Christians who are just too slow or lazy to put that principle into practice?

FATHER RUTLER: When you say, though, it doesn't answer the question of the 20th Century, well, the 20th Century only has 16, or less, years to go. We are now approaching the post-modern age. And the liberation theologians represent the last crumbs of modern materialism, which has just left carnage throughout this modern age. And it's going to be a re-rooting of one's self in the essential foundation of cultural discourse in the 21st Century that's really going to prevent those mistakes from being

repeated.

BUCKLEY: Well, I happen -- and I don't think this will surprise you -- to agree with you. But I do think that we need to come up with more communicable means of causing people who are restless under the sanction of the traditional ideas to feel that we are energetically on their side and that something will indeed, and should, happen to better their material lot, and that this can happen much more productively other than under Marxism.

FATHER RUTLER: Well, the clearest explication one can look at is the Lumingencium (?) document of the Second Vatican Council.

BUCKLEY: Right. And people like Cardinal Trujillo...

FATHER SMITH: And people like John Paul II, who the day after he read the Mexican bis -- the Latin American bishops the riot act on staying out of politics, he went to Southern Mexico the next day and told all those Indians for their rights, and he'd help them.

BUCKLEY: Yeah.

FATHER RUTLER: At the risk of pedantry, there's a line -- and it's indirectly referred to in the Ratzinger document -- from Lumingencium, it's the thirteenth note on the Church, it's a quotation of St. John Chrisistum (?). [Latin expression]: "He who sits in Rome knows that in the farthest corners of the world are his members." That it is in the seat of unity in the Pope, through whom the Holy Spirit speaks, that the human race understands its destiny and receives an authority for direction

And this is the problem of liberation theology, is they try to disunite that voice, looking upon the hierarchical structure of the Church as some kind of bourgeois imposition upon a free people.

BUCKLEY: And that insight, you think, is communicable in any mode -- i.e., among intellectuals, among peasants.

FATHER RUTLER: Which insight?

BUCKLEY: Well, the insight of the institutional help that the Church can itself give.

FATHER RUTLER: Yes. And there's a natural inclination against it, not in a Marxist form, but I suppose what a Marxist would call the bourgeois form in America, when people start talking about an American church, or a mass which is a celebration of life, which is a kind of subrbvanized version of the

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celebrations of the progress of labor in Latin America.

BUCKLEY: Thank you, Father George William Rutler.

Thank you, Father William Smith.